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Media Release

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i Source: [Labour Force, Australia, May 2021](#)

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell to 5.1 per cent in May 2021, with employment increasing by 115,000 people from April to May, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Unemployment

Bjorn Jarvis, head of labour statistics at the ABS, said May was the seventh consecutive monthly fall in the unemployment rate.

"The unemployment rate fell to 5.1 per cent, which was below March 2020 (5.3 per cent) and back to the level in February 2020 (5.1 per cent). The declining unemployment rate continues to align with the strong increases in job vacancies" Mr Jarvis said.

"The number of unemployed people fell by 53,000 in May, down to 701,000. The number of unemployed people has fallen by around 303,000 since the peak of 1 million unemployed people in July 2020."

"The youth unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage points but remained low, at 10.7 per cent. The last time we saw a youth unemployment rate as low as in April and May 2021 was in January 2009."

Employment and hours worked

The latest fall in the unemployment rate coincided with a strong increase in employment between April and May.

"Employment increased by 115,000 people in May, following the 31,000 fall in April, around the Easter holiday period. Over the past two months, employment increased by around 84,000 people, and was 1.0 per cent higher in May 2021 than at the start of the pandemic," Mr Jarvis said.

The number of employed women increased by 69,000 in May, and the number of men by 46,000. Female employment was 1.6 per cent above the start of the pandemic, compared with 0.5 per cent for men.

"The increase in female employment in May means that a higher percentage of women were in paid work than ever before – 58.8 per cent, 0.7 percentage points higher than the start of the pandemic. The difference was even greater for women aged 15 to 64, whose employment-to-population ratio in May was 1.5 percentage points above March 2020," Mr Jarvis said.

Hours worked increased by 1.4 per cent between April and May, and 0.7 per cent over the past two months. Hours worked were 2.9 per cent higher than at the start of the pandemic (4.1 per cent higher for women and 2.1 per cent higher for men).

Participation

The participation rate increased 0.3 percentage points to 66.2 per cent, following the 0.3 percentage points fall in April, and was close to its historical high of March 2021 (66.3 per cent).

The female participation rate increased 0.4 percentage points to 61.7 per cent, also close to its March historical high, and the male participation rate increased 0.1 percentage points to 70.9 per cent.

Underemployment

Underemployment decreased by 0.3 percentage points to 7.4 per cent in May 2021, its lowest level since January 2014. This was 1.4 percentage points below the start of the pandemic (1.9 percentage points below for women and 0.8 below for men).

The underutilisation rate, which combines unemployment and underemployment, decreased by 0.7 percentage points to 12.5 per cent. This was the eighth consecutive fall in the underutilisation rate since October 2020, and the lowest level it had been since February 2013.

Today's release includes additional analysis of hours worked, including people working zero

hours, and an analysis of employment and hours worked at state and territory level.

Further information, including regional labour market information, will be available in the upcoming May 2021 issue of [Labour Force, Australia, Detailed \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release\)](#), due for release on Thursday 24 June 2021.

The ABS would like to thank Australians for their continued support in responding to our surveys during such a difficult time.

Media notes

- The May survey reference period was 02 May to 15 May 2021 which was prior to the Victorian lockdown from 28 May 2021.
- People in the Labour Force are either employed, or unemployed. In order to be unemployed, people must be actively looking for work, and available to start work during the reference week.
- The 'youth' age group refers to 15-24 year-olds.
- The numbers in the media release are rounded to the nearest thousand people. For more detailed numbers see the data downloads tab in the [Labour Force, Australia \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release\)](#) publication.
- The ABS has suspended publishing trend series for the COVID-19 period.
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